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ABSTRACT

Suggestions for meeting the needs of returning adult students at The Pennsylvania State University, New Kensington Campus, are presented. The suggestions resulted from meetings involving undergraduate adult representatives and faculty organizational officers. Recommendations are offered regarding: orientation, financial aid, book loan fund, the Lifelong Educational Assessment Program (LEAP), advising, adult-on-campus office or lounge, student information center, a student co-op, seminars and workshops, a crisis intervention grant, and publicity concerning programs and services available to meet adult students' needs. Specific suggestions include: a separate orientation package for adult students should be developed; a centralized location and structure to channel all information concerning financial aid, grants, loans, and scholarships should be established; a semester-length program of testing, evaluation, career guidance, and study-skills training (LEAP) should be created to help adults make the transition to college work; and advisors should be selected on the basis of knowledge about, sensitivity to, and interest in the returning adult student. (SW)

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MEETING NEEDS OF ADULT UNIVERSITY STUDENTS:

A MODEL DESIGNED BY ADULT STUDENTS

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MEETING NEEDS OF ADULT UNIVERSITY STUDENTS:
A MODEL DESIGNED BY ADULT STUDENTS

The purpose of the model presented here was to establish a structural vehicle, using existing institutional resources and personnel where possible, in order to address the needs of returning adult students at The Pennsylvania State University, New Kensington Campus. The catalyst for establishing a separate, distinct program for adult students came from grievances expressed by these students in their Adults-on-Campus organization meetings. After a meeting with the Campus Executive Officer to discuss these grievances, the executive board of the Adults-on-Campus organization and their faculty advisors were requested to develop specific need assessments and to suggest how these needs might be more adequately addressed by the New Kensington Campus administration and faculty. The model presented here resulted from a series of meetings involving the three undergraduate adults on the Adults-on-Campus executive board and their two faculty organizational officers.[1]

I. Orientation

The Committee suggests that a separate orientation package be designed specifically for adult students. The student aggregate is sufficiently diverse, large, and unique enough to merit a separate and distinct orientation. Since the program will be "packaged," it can be given several different times and can also be presented to off-campus groups (e.g., schools, factories, businesses, etc.) by Continuing Education personnel in conjunction

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[1]The group included: Janice Altenburger (Past President); Judy Regner and Kathy Quinlan (Co-Chairpersons, 1983-84); Dr. Barbara W. Uncapher (Assistant Professor of Speech Communication); and Dr. Robert E. Carnahan (Assistant Professor of Sociology).

with adult speakers. The emphasis in this program should be on information and not necessarily recruitment.

It is further suggested that an information booklet should be designed by Student Affairs specifically delineating the needs of adult learners. This booklet should include information on educational terms, financial aid, C.L.E.P. requirements, a directory of campus offices indicating how to get problems solved, a directory of local agencies and churches that assist adults with various problems, etc.

During the orientation, adult students should have access to counselors, advisors, faculty persons, etc., who are sensitive to their unique problems.[2]

II. Financial Aid

There is a need to establish a centralized location and structure as a conduit to channel all information concerning financial aid, grants, loans, and scholarships. Given the economically perilous times students find themselves in, this center should be staffed by a qualified person or persons who have time to seek information on financial assistance, order needed forms, pamphlets, etc., and be available on a regular basis to assist all incoming students and their parents in receiving the best financial package available. It is imperative that extensive financial counseling be available to all students- especially those with unique economic problems.

A. Copies of the pamphlet (or some equal substitute) entitled "The Student Guide: Five Federal Financial Programs," (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982-564-389/052) should be given

[2] An excellent model of this type of orientation program is the one designed and implemented by the University of Massachusetts at Boston. Of course, each institution will have to modify the model to meet its unique needs.

to all prospective students during interviews or by mail. The time frame for financial assistance requires early response to student financial needs.

B. Copies of published Scholarship Catalogs should be purchased and made available to students who wish to pursue additional scholarships and grants.

C. The Financial Officer should assemble a basic package for presentation to students at orientation sessions. The package should contain a simplified listing of available forms and qualifications for aid. This information could be included as a section of the Student Handbook. A listing of local monies should be part of the package.

D. The Financial Officer should work with local organizations in the service area. Part of the Officer's job should be to encourage local grants, scholarships, awards, and donations designed for both university-wide and local scholarship programs.

E. Since the suggested financial aid program is so closely tied to the payment of tuition and fees, it is suggested that it be administered through the Finance Office instead of through Student Affairs. However, if the financial aid program is administered through Student Affairs, it is suggested that one person be assigned to this position with the understanding that this is their primary responsibility.

F. Special Educational Support Grants (SESG):

1. All students requiring financial assistance should meet with the Financial Aid Officer, who will keep a comprehensive file

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on each student. The file should include a record of all assistance applied for and an up-to-date acceptance-rejection record.

2. If all traditional avenues of support have been tried and financial need still exists, any student in good academic standing may then apply for a Special Educational Support Grant.
3. The monies for these grants will be administered locally.
   a) Disbursement will be decided by a committee consisting of the campus Executive Officer, three faculty members, an Adults-on-Campus co-leader, and three ex-officio members representing Student Affairs, Financial Aid, and Academic Affairs.
   b) The Financial Officer will provide the Committee with a record of the student's attempts to obtain aid through traditional channels.
   c) The student seeking the grant will also present a detailed statement of sources of support (e.g., housing, food, clothing, transportation, financial assistance, etc.) currently available to them.
      (1) The student will also list all current assets and liabilities and will describe the circumstances which may have disqualified him/her from receiving other types of support.[3]

[3]Nontraditional students often fail to meet the criteria for "dependence" required by state and federal documents, which disqualifies them for aid.

d) The committee will interview the financial officer and the student.

(1) At this juncture, the committee may ask the student's advisor, Registrar, or any faculty person to specify the student's academic progress to date.

4. Regular deadlines will be set for SESG applications.

a) If unusual circumstances arise during the semester, students may apply for emergency assistance.

(1) Emergency assistance may be given for help in short-term financial crises, which interfere with a student's ability to attend classes or to make satisfactory academic progress.

(2) This emergency assistance should be given only after all other traditional avenues of support have been exhausted. The Committee may request verification of such attempts.

(3) Requests for emergency assistance should be channeled through the Financial Aid Officer, who will assist the student in the use of the traditional channels.

G. Book Loan Fund

1. In addition to the financial aid components listed above, locally-generated monies could be used to start a loan fund for full-time students who have difficulty meeting the costs of books and supplies at the beginning of the semester.

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a) This fund could be increased by assessing a small interest charge, handling fee, or flat service fee.

b) The loan would have to be repaid by the end of each semester.

c) Application for the loan would be available to any full-time student (in good academic standing) who has completed at least one semester at Penn State.

(1) The loan could also be in the form of credit from the Bookstore.

III. L.E.A.P.

Lifelong Educational Assessment Program is a proposed semester-long program of testing, evaluation, career guidance, and study-skills training.

A. The basic purpose of the program would be to assist students who are unsure or anxious about going to college. These students (or potential students) would have a semester in which to decide whether or not college is appropriate for them at this stage in their lives.

1. The potential student need not register during the first term for classes.

2. Even part-time students with the same questions may wish to become involved in this "semester of decision" while they are taking a course or two at the campus.

B. For a small fee, this program would be available to anyone within the community who might be interested in finding out if they have the necessary skills to achieve in college in a no-grade, non-threatening situation.

1. Rather than requiring new personnel, this program should be structured, coordinated, advertised, and administered through Continuing Education.
2. It might be advantageous to apply for grant monies to assist in planning, developing, and implementing this program.

C. Inquiries from potential students would be handled by the Receptionist in two basic ways:
   1. Traditional students would be connected with the usual personnel in Student Affairs (Admissions).
   2. Inquiries from non-traditional students should be directed to the L.E.A.P. coordinator who may offer the L.E.A.P. program in whole, in part, or supplemented by academic courses.
      a) Determination of the mix of courses will be based on diagnostic testing scores and the student's wishes.

D. Testing: A testing package should be developed and administered which includes basic skills testing, local placement tests, C.L.E.P. exams, etc.
   1. These tests would then be reviewed with the potential student, primarily as a diagnostic tool at first, and later as a planning format for future courses and goals.

E. Career Interests and Exploration: Students can be provided with computerized programs that specify potential careers, courses, etc.
   1. This program can be supplemented with career counseling from faculty persons, external representatives from business and industries- all emphasizing career exploration.

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2. The Counseling Center could coordinate this segment of the program.

F. Group classes: Day and evening sessions could be developed emphasizing the following points.

1. Study-skills workshops for both traditional and non-traditional students could emphasize the pragmatic aspects of education, such as how to read effectively, how to outline and take notes, how to study for exams, etc.

a) These programs would require a remedial faculty person or a counselor skilled in these subjects.

b) Given the general lack of academic preparedness manifested by current students, this person would seem to be critical at most institutions of higher education.

2. Transition workshops could be conducted by faculty persons on a volunteer basis.

a) These workshops might easily become the basis of a course for L.E.A.P. students.

b) The workshops could include such topics as the dynamics of change, stress, assertiveness, interpersonal communication, the nature of conflict, problem solving, the life cycle, etc.

c) These workshops could be available to regularly enrolled students as well as the general public as part of a community relations program.

3. Systems readiness:

a) A faculty person from each discipline could explain the

basic baccalaureate courses offered in their respective field. Students could be provided with checksheets for the various majors in the college, and discussion sessions could center on the job opportunities available in each of the majors.

(1) Most of the current literature involving adult learners indicates that they take a very pragmatic, vocational view of their education (Tough, 1968; Menges, 1981; Hall, 1974; etc.).

b) The emphasis would be placed on helping L.E.A.P. students understand how the required vs. elective course system works, how to read and work with the catalog, how to read a registration list, and what a potential career path in any given field will require, including transfers to other institutions.

c) A Student Affairs representative should instruct the L.E.A.P. students concerning basic rules of procedure as well as academic "jargon" (e.g., provisional, nondegree, C.E., R.I., late drop, Q.P.A., etc).

G. Individual instruction:

1. Remedial instruction could be implemented in a number of ways: student tutorial program (use of work-study grants); faculty-to-student; remedial staff-to-student; self-correcting videotape instructional programs; minicomputer programs; etc. Many of the latter types of programs are already available commercially and could be purchased for immediate use.

2. A Library Skills Workbook could be utilized to encourage students to become familiar with the organization and materials in the Library and the Media Center.

H. The last segment of the L.E.A.P. semester should be used to familiarize students with their progress in the program, assess their needs, and attempt to determine whether or not this institution can effectively meet those needs.

1. If this institution cannot meet the needs of these students, every effort should be made to assist the student in determining where their major problems and strengths are and how they can best deal with each of these in their future.

2. Students who have returned to this campus ("returning adults") indicate that a program like L.E.A.P. would do much to alleviate the returning student's most common fear- failure. In the suggested program, fear of failure is not a problem. Students will be provided with the opportunity to come to the campus on a regular basis. They will meet other students and faculty and become familiar with the physical plant. They will meet the staff and understand how the system works. In this "non-fear", non-alienating atmosphere, students can be gradually integrated into the campus community.

IV. Advising

A. Regular academic advisors, Continuing Education advisors and/or Evening Advisors should be selected and available on the basis of knowledge about, sensitivity to, and interest in the returning adult student.

B. The Financial Aid Officer will provide all the counseling and information previously cited to the returning adult students.

C. The regular counseling services, especially career guidance, will be available to the returning adults.

D. Along with their faculty sponsors, Adults-on-Campus will act in role modeling, advising, and supportive capacities.

E. These programs can be supplemented by a section in the student information brochure that specifies community agencies that might potentially be needed by certain segments of the returning adult pool (e.g., Family and Children's Services, Salvation Army, Legal Assistance, etc.).

F. Efforts can be made to have local agencies come to the campus to explain their services or perhaps even provide services at the campus. For example:

1. The local Mental Health-Mental Retardation Agency may provide part-time counseling services on the campus (most student insurance programs partially fund psychological service and assistance needs).

2. On our campus, the local organization designed to assist women who are subject to domestic abuse (H.O.P.E.) has offered a part-time volunteer to aid students in need of this support.

V. Adults-on-Campus Office or Lounge

A. The object should be to give returning adult students an identifiable support and social group that assists their assimilation into the campus community. Thus, the dual purpose of identity (support) and

integration is accomplished, overcoming some of the anxiety attendant with returning to college.

B . The organization should have its own meeting place (lounge, or office), officers, advisors, recognition, etc.

VI. Student Information Center (an Official Conduit into the System)

A. An Adult-Student Information Center would be most appropriately located in the organization's office or lounge. This should be a vital means of getting information to adults which is pertinent to their needs. It should also help to foster a sense of identity and integration into the campus community.

B. The receptionist is a key to ensuring that students are ushered into the system as quickly as possible.

1. The receptionist must be trained to channel phone calls, visitors, and prospective students to the appropriate offices in a friendly expeditious manner. The receptionist is viewed as a key gate-keeper and a critical position in the structure of the institution.

2. Potential students must be linked to the appropriate offices (e.g., traditional students, non-traditional students, financial aid, counseling, etc.).

3. Regardless of the entry channel, prospective students should be scheduled for a personal interview where information can be given on a face-to-face basis. Interviews may be an integral part of the orientation program. Adults-on-Campus personnel, faculty, Student Govt. leaders, as well as administrative personnel should participate.

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VII. Student Cooperative Program

A. In conjunction with the Adults-on-Campus organization and financial assistance, another support system for students in general could be a Student Co-op.

1. In this Co-op, which could be administered through Student Affairs, students could exchange or barter services in lieu of purchasing them with money.

a) For example, a student might be willing to exchange typing or laundry services for auto or home repairs.

b) A student book exchange program might help to reduce the increased costs of purchasing texts.

2. This co-op, although open to all students, would seem to be particularly appropriate for returning adults who have financial problems (e.g., laid-off workers, divorced women, etc.).

B. Day Care Co-op

1. This will be a critical need for married women with children who wish to continue their education.

2. The children's needs should be adequately planned for before this step is undertaken (e.g., toys, beds, bathrooms, etc.).

3. This program should include stimulating socialization experiences for the children while their parent(s) are taking courses.

4. Parents may wish to pay a flat fee for this service or volunteer to serve in the center in lieu of money.

5. Students could volunteer time also; they might be given college credits by using the center as a lab and integrating this practical experience with classwork in specific courses (e.g., educational

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psychology, individual and family studies, etc.).

C. Clothing Co-op Exchange

1. Students/parents will have an opportunity to exchange children's clothing. This program could be coordinated through the Adults-on-Campus organization.

VIII. Seminars and Workshops:

A. These could be developed for students as well as the general public.

B. Faculty persons should be encouraged to present workshops related to topics of concern to returning adults.

C. Students would be able to attend these workshops on a preference or need basis.

D. Topics for possible consideration in these workshops might include: change, stress, assertiveness, mental health, life stage transitions, alternatives to frustration, personal finance, etc.

IX. Crisis Intervention Grant:

A. Monies should be sought (externally and internally) to ensure that the SESG, H.O.P.E. on Campus, and the Book Loan Fund become operative.

X. Public Awareness of the Program:

A. Presentations must be developed for the purpose of making the public aware that these programs are available and in operation at this campus.

1. This could be accomplished by taping presentations and/or using adult volunteers to present the package to community groups and agencies.

2. These presentations may become a permanent part of the Speakers' Bureau.

XI. Tax-Free Donations:

A. We need to channel donations into the local campus in order to fund many of these suggested programs.

1. This could become a major task of the Board of Directors, if they are convinced to become involved.

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